THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) While granting licences to six private operators with effective date in 1997-98, a condition was imposed that private operators would provide Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in 97,806 villages in first 3 years from the effective date. It was also stipulated that the action will be taken against those operators who failed to fulfil their roll out obiligation.

(c) and (d) Private Operators have provided 11632 VPTs as on 30th June, 2003. These including 830 VPTs provided in Punjab as replacement of MARR VPTs. The Government has been persuading the private Basic Service Operators of fulfil their committed roll out obligations. Liquidated Damage Charges to the tune of Rs. 53.75 crores have been recovered from six Private Basic Telephone Service Operators for the delay in commencement of service as well as for the delay in provisioning of VPTs and Director Exchange Lines.

Bangalore, A Global Telecom City

1202. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Bangalore is all set to become first Global Telecom City by the year 2008; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Rural WLL services in Andhra Pradesh

1203. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the coverage of rural WLL services is very less;

(b) if so, whether Government propose to increase the coverage area;

(c) whether Government also propose to construct new telephone exchanges in rural areas; and

(d) the steps taken to provide coverage of all towns and cities for cell phones in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) to (d) The Government has issued licences for operation of basic telephone services to two private operators apart from Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in Andhra Pradesh. All operators are free to deploy any technology including Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) for provision of the services to their customers and offer various facilities. According to the information available, such systems have already been installed in 194 Short Distance Charging Areas (SDCAs) which are typically tehsils. As reported by licencees, the service is available at present in 91 SDCAs to the consumers including 44 rural SDCAs. The installed systems in balance SDCAs will be commissioned after successful completion of interconnection test. Each operators is free to decide its own criteria to construct new telephone exchanges in rural areas. Further, the roll out obligations of cellular operators stipulates coverage of 50% district headquarters or any town in that district in lieu of within 3 years of signing of the agreement. The Celluar Operators are free to take their own commercial decisions to provide coverage in all towns and cities.

Basic telecom operators' rural telephony obligation

1204. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the deadline for the basic telecom operators to fulfil their rural telephony obligations has been extended;

(b) whether these operators during the last six years have extended their presence only to a minimal 7 per cent of the number of villages that they were contractually bound to connect;